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ABSTRACT

This research review deals with student studies that focus on comparative and remedial populations. The most popular subject for comparative study is the transfer student vs. the non-transfer student. Other studies involve selection of vocational/technical programs, initial or deferred decisions regarding school majors, and characteristics of different schools. The author questions the worth of such studies. Rather than compile information on groups at one point in time, she suggests, it would be better to establish common data sources and compare the effects over a period of years. Many in the junior college field are dedicated to a curriculum designed to meet identifiable educational needs of disadvantaged students. The second half of the review attempts to answer (1) how remedial programs affect the student and (2) how pertinent they are to the lives of those they purport to serve. Disadvantaged and/or remedial students need options they can visualize as real opportunities. This will require assessment and variations in admission requirements, counseling, testing, and/or success criteria. (CA)

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STUDENT STUDIES: COMPARATIVE AND REMEDIAL POPULATIONS*

How can we characterize 2,000,000 people? Height? Weight? Prior academic achievement? Personality characteristics? Parents' income and country of national origin? There is no end to the possible categories.

Ways and reasons, means and ends. The how and the why of assessing students remain in flux. Yet we measure them and produce an unwieldy number of reports that draw pictures of the "typical" junior college student, the student dropout, the student activist – pictures that are often vague, confusing, and of indeterminate value.

There is probably no school in existence that does not gather information about its students—a point readily attested to by the preponderance of ERIC documents describing students. This review deals with student studies that focus on comparative and remedial populations.

Comparative Studies of Students

In education, as elsewhere, we make comparisons. Studies comparing transfer and non-transfer students appear to be especially popular even though none of their findings are particularly earth-shaking. A case in point is Anthony's report (ED 019 088) that transfer students generally come from higher socio-economic levels and from academic high school backgrounds, score higher on college tests, are upwardly mobile, and emphasize prestige as a factor in career selection. Although the occupational choices of both transfer and non-transfer students are influenced by their parents, more students with higher academic ranks go directly to four-year institutions than to junior colleges.

According to ACT data, transfer students make higher composite scores than terminal students. The reason for this is quite obvious—in many colleges, a student is not allowed to enter a transfer program if his test scores fall below a certain cut-off point. Also, for some junior college groups, there are differences between transfer and terminal students on high school and college grades—again, for the same reason. However, there are exceptions. Munday, (5), for example, found it unusual for transfer students to achieve *both* higher test scores and higher high school grades than terminal students. Although some differences between test scores and grades were evident, they were small; in fact, transfer and terminal students appeared to be far more alike than different.

Also using ACT data, Fenske (2) reported that, although significantly more seniors indicating vocational/technical plans ranked in the lowest 30 per cent in scholastic ability, the presence of a local vocational/technical college had a greater influence on their plans than did the lack of such an institution. To identify influences on the selection and completion of vocational/technical programs, McCallum (ED 022 453) studied male junior college students who made initial or deferred decisions regarding their school majors. Comparisons had already been made of 327 students from six San Francisco area junior colleges —those who started in a vocational/technical program (initial group) and those who began in a transfer group and later changed their majors (deferred group). Both groups were equally influenced by parents and college teachers, and generally agreed on occupations that were held in high or low esteem. Only 10 per cent of these students expressed dissatisfaction with their majors, but, interestingly enough and despite their vocational/technical orientation, more than 70 per cent described plans to transfer to four-year institutions.

Comparative studies of students are often indigenous to their own schools and stay well within their institutional boundaries. Exceptions do occasionally crop up, however —as in Gold's investigation of students' religious attitudes at three extremely different schools (ED 013 073). Selected results, analyzed from previous studies conducted at Harvard, Radcliffe, and Los Angeles City College from 1946 to 1948 and from 1966 to 1967, indicated that all three of these institutions had become more liberal since 1946, with both religious commitment and traditional religious behavior becoming less common. Students professed less need for religious orientations and beliefs and/or an explicit belief in a personal God, although students at LACC indicated the most conservative attitudes toward religion.

Looking at other characteristics among a broader sampling of institutions, Tillery (ED 019 953) examined University of California freshmen and their peers at California junior colleges. Although academic ability was definitely related to the choice of college or university, much diversity was found within each institution—a finding corroborated in numerous studies. The university student was usually seen as having been better prepared academically, eligible to enter college at the end of seven rather than eight high school semesters and—providing his campus offered a self-challenging, liberal-cultural atmosphere—significantly higher in intellectual motivation, while the junior college student indicated greater interest in applied learning. Further comparisons suggested that the greater social maturity of the university student was matched by his greater flexibility in ideas and values, while the junior college student was less responsive to new experiences.

Corroborating some of these results, Hoyt and Munday found that junior college students, representing 85 schools, were somewhat less academically able than their peers at 205 four-year colleges. Differences among junior colleges in academic potential were so great, however, that the

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least able students in one college could be above average in another. "Similarly, the average academic potential at several junior colleges was well above the average in typical four-year institutions" (ED 011 196). Students within individual junior colleges demonstrated more diverse academic talents than was typical of students in four-year institutions, and the college grades for these junior college people were also more varied.

Comparisons of institutional and student characteristics are included in the continuing attempts to predict academic success. An ACT report by Betz (1) includes measures of 36 college characteristics inter-correlated for 581 junior colleges, and the experiences and achievements of junior college graduates from 29 specific colleges. In one study, the majority of students reported that they planned to transfer to a four-year college, worked for part of their two years of college, commuted to the campus, and were generally satisfied with their school.

Such studies are assumed to be worthwhile—else why continue doing them? But are they really? The comparative study yields information about groups of students at one point in time, but wouldn't it be better to establish common data sources and compare effects over a period of years? Only in that fashion could the results of changed procedures of recruitment, admission, counseling, instruction, and curriculum be assessed.

The Disadvantaged

Well-documented by the statements of many who are actively involved in junior college education is the dedication to a curriculum designed particularly to meet the identifiable educational needs of disadvantaged students. Whether "disadvantaged" is defined in terms of academic handicaps or socio-economic deprivation, few schools fail to acknowledge a concern for this type of student. Remedial programs, enhanced counseling services, and a host of other special activities are created to serve this separately identified population. Just how do remedial programs affect the student? How pertinent are they to the lives of the people they purport to serve? Some attempts to answer these questions will be described here.

Reference is frequently made to the effects of "deprivation" on aspirations, values, motivation, and self-concept, as well as to its influence on academic progress. According to several studies, (ED 015 754; 3), the student who falls under this rubric needs to develop positive feelings of worth and value that are important for him individually and for society generally and to develop the social, conceptual, and manipulative skills necessary to fulfill his goals. College programs may help by attempting to develop special skills and to stimulate changes needed for such development by concentrating on what can be done within the context of the student's own nature and the pressures exerted upon him. For the disadvantaged student, these pressures typically include a lack of educational tradition, low motivation and low self-esteem, poor reading and language skills, antagonism toward school and authority figures, and, frequently, an unstable home life. To improve self-image and to reinforce motivation, a comprehensive program must give the student a chance to experience some success in his learning. Disadvantaged students need options that they can visualize as real opportunities. Programs to create or maximize such opportunities will often require variations in admission procedures, success criteria other than academic achievement, and preadmission counseling.

Several colleges have designed special readiness programs to integrate minority youths into both college and community. The College of San Mateo (California), for example, rejected scores on entrance examinations for their disadvantaged students on the grounds that they were invalid predictors of grades (ED 017 231). At Foothill (California) College (ED 022 437), a program designed to help students needing remedial work included a combination of courses in English and psychology, a team teaching approach, and block scheduling procedures.

Student and faculty questionnaires have been used to identify and assess programs especially designed for the disadvantaged. Looking at students in California colleges, Berg and Axtell (ED 026 032) noted a pervasive money problem, lack of study time, a low degree of correspondence between expectation and reality, and a general approval of the institution. Other investigators report results worth considering in different schools. Gold (ED 018 180), for example, conducted a six-week experiment for three groups of under-educated youths in the Los Angeles City Junior College District: 50 students with low high school grades, 51 with bilingual home backgrounds and also with low grades, and 51 admitted to college but unable to maintain a C average. Students in all three groups attended tutorial sessions and cultural events; Group One students also took courses in a bilingual context; and Group Three enrolled in a psychology course as well as one called "Man in Society." In pre- and post-testing of attitudes by means of an inventory purporting to assess the meaning of words, fifteen of thirty items showed a positive change on the part of the students. In subsequent reading tests, students in Group Three showed the greatest improvement and those in Group One, the least. Of greatest impact, however, was the fact that 83 per cent of all these low-potential students were still enrolled in school at the end of the project.

A follow-up survey of 67 Project Success students at the Urban Education Center, City College of Chicago (Illinois) and of 69 students receiving remedial training at other Chicago campuses indicated that students overwhelmingly supported the principle of remedial education, that personalized remedial training significantly increased their desire to persist in college, and that remedial assistance cannot be instituted as a program adjunct—that is, merely to intensify the usual curriculum of a single year (ED 039 870).

Other surveys have reached different conclusions. Participant opinions were obtained through questionnaires and interviews on Georgia Southwestern College's remedial program, dissemination of publicity, the program's deficiencies, and potential improvements (ED 015 737). Because the students did not regard this program as an opportunity to learn anything or to form a basis for choice between college or some other activity, it was recommended that certain curriculum changes be made.

A study at Cerritos (California) College (ED 039 868) revealed inadequate guidance procedures. After being placed on probation, only one-third of the students initially selecting a transfer major changed to a non-transfer one. Almost the same number of probationary students changed to a more difficult major as the number selecting an easier one, while the proportion of students seeking non-transfer majors declined over time. A major cause of high attrition rates, as well as of failure to earn junior college degrees, was attributed to this reluctance on the part of students to accept more realistic goals—a failure that, according to existing research, is probably tied to family and social pressures, preconceived notions of certain levels of prestige with different majors, and ineffective remedial instruction and guidance programs.

Not all findings are negative. Indeed, some programs

seem to have a different impact on students. At San Diego City College, for example, 122 students in the general studies program were compared for four consecutive semesters with a control group of 128 students enrolled in other programs (ED 039 881). Completion of the general studies program seemed to encourage males and minority students to re-enroll in school for a second semester. Additionally, minority students who had enrolled in the program dropped fewer units for the first semester than those who had not enrolled.

But no matter how adequate the research, how relevant the criteria, or how appropriate the methodology, program evaluation has little to say to the individual who forms but one spoke in the large wheel of student populations. While there are several subcategories of "high-risk student," the stereotyping of his performance needs no documentation. We need better understanding, not more figures, and we need truly committed people to work with low-performing students. We must also understand the differential characteristics of students categorized as high-risk and answer such complaints as Moore's that "Black students are being denied college entrance because of a white standardization measure—entrance exams and high school rank" (4). What are the strengths of disadvantaged students in areas other than academic ability? What are some of the goals of under-achieving students compared to the goals of achievers and over-achievers? Do the attitudes of these disadvantaged students differ from those of other students?

An allied question is whether remedial students' attitudes toward academic skills, activities, and aspirations differ from those of high-achieving students. Perceptions of self and of the ideal student, as well as perceptions of the college's expectations, have been surveyed by several investigators. At Los Angeles City College, students admitted on probation because of low test scores were seen as viewing the college from a vocational orientation and seeing no need for high academic skills and interests, although they did express the belief that the ideal student possessed such qualities. They also expressed faith in the junior college to provide what the economy and the social milieu had not offered them, faith in the junior college as an aid to a more productive economic life, a very high self-esteem as students, and an expressed willingness to subject themselves to the discipline of regular study. Further, they were confident that their values and needs were similar to those of both the college and the ideal student (ED 014 274).

If some degree of congruence exists among certain characteristics, how can we better understand and assist the disadvantaged student? Like Cross (ED 024 354), Knoell argues against the use of traditional instruments to assess this type of person, noting that:

> The disadvantaged student tends to be handicapped in a variety of ways when confronted with group tests of aptitude and achievement in common use in the schools. . . . A prior handicap is his basic lack of motivation to do well on the tests, in part because of his self-concept as a loser in school competition (ED 041 573).

And Sheldon, in the December 1970 issue of the *Junior College Research Review*, calls into question *all* placement testing—for any group of students.

Since testing and other selection procedures usually apply to academic aptitudes and not to other qualities and, accordingly, may have negative effects on the expectations of certain students, we need to look for different methods of appraisal and for alternative educational systems. Every person possesses both strengths and weaknesses. Do we honestly bother to look at both?

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